

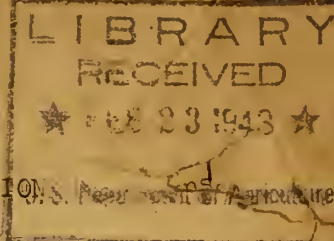
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Food Distribution Administration



RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FOOD DISTRIBUTION ADMINISTRATION

By Dan A. West, Chief, Wholesalers and Retailers Branch  
Address before Kiwanis Club at a luncheon at the Emerson  
Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland, February 4, 1943

When I returned from a meeting in Chicago last week, I learned that arrangements had been made for me to speak here today. Everything about the meeting had been decided upon--including the subject I was to discuss. So I cannot take any credit-or blame-today for having hit upon the word "Responsibilities" in the title of my address.

In a way, I am sorry that I cannot claim it as my choice--for I like the word "Responsibilities" as applied to any Government agency. Too often there is emphasis on the "powers" of an agency, or its administrative functions, or its limitations of authority, or the personality and point of view of the men at the top. Actually, the most important questions one can ask about a Governmental organization are these: What are its responsibilities? With what part of the success of the war effort is it entrusted?

In the food administration we have a solemn obligation and responsibility: To see that our resources are best utilized in the efficient production and distribution of food--food for our fighting men, our allies, and our civilian population. To put it another way: We are responsible for seeing that the right amounts of food are available at the right time and at the right place. To take still another view: We are responsible for seeing to it that the slogan, "Food will win the war and write the peace", becomes a reality. Put in the most simple language possible: Our responsibility is to feed the people--all the people--our armed forces, our fighting allies, and the home front army which is backing up our soldiers in uniform.

Accompanying this tremendous task is still another: Our job is to keep the people of this country informed concerning the food program and its part in the war effort. We must assume the responsibility for telling our people in an honest, straightforward way, what the food administration is doing, why it is being done, and how the people can help. That is the democratic way--and it is the only way which will guarantee success.

I am sure you are familiar with the general plan which has been adopted to fulfill our responsibility for the efficient production and distribution of food. You know, for example, that we have a Food Production Administration and a Food Distribution Administration, both under the general direction of Secretary Wickard as food administrator. You know that we are utilizing the Agricultural Marketing Administration machinery to a large extent, enlarging its staff both in Washington and in the regions. You know that we have absorbed the old War Production Board Food Branch. You know that we are preparing and administering orders designed to secure full utilization of our resources. The bakery order, the ice cream order and the milk distribution order, are examples of this phase of our work.

As I say, you know these things. Many of you are in businesses which are directly affected by our activities. All of you read the newspapers and, I am sure, honestly try to understand what is being done to guarantee efficient production and distribution of food.

However, there are thousands of people whom we have not yet reached in fulfilling our important responsibility of keeping the people informed. During the two months which the food administration has existed we have tried to supply the press and radio with honest information for the consuming public--but we have hardly scratched the surface. The task is an enormous one--a continuing one.

One thing which convinces me that we have not yet reached all the people is the recurrence of certain statements concerning the food program. You hear these statements from business men, from housewives, from all segments of our population. You see them occasionally in the press. Every one of them has been refuted a number of times by Government information released through the Office of War Information--yet they persist.

To show you the difficulty of fulfilling our information responsibility, I should like to give you these often-refuted-but-still-believed statements, along with the real facts in each case.

I will start by reading a letter which appeared in a Washington newspaper Monday night: It was signed "Vox Pop". I quote: "Why should we give Britain and Russia all our best food and reserve the garbage for ourselves? I realize it is treasonable to think of America first, but I still think we should use the best and let others have what is left if anything--cash and carry." Obviously, this is an extreme way of saying that too much food is being shipped abroad under Lend-Lease, and that our civilian population is suffering. Now, many people who would not go so far as to say we are reserving the "garbage" for ourselves are honestly concerned about the size of our food shipments under Lend-Lease. They are confused about the real facts in the case, and in many cases the confusion is the result of subtle Axis propaganda.

You will appreciate the fact that we cannot release current figures on lend-lease shipments for reasons of military secrecy. However, we have now released detailed information on Lend-Lease food operations in 1942. I want to summarize some of those figures for you.

Last year, military and lend-lease needs together took between 12 and 13 percent of our food production. More than half of the food for those two uses went to our own forces--56 percent as compared with 44 percent for our allies. In a speech last week, Secretary Wickard gave some interesting information which should be known to every man, woman, and child in America. I am going to quote some of his comments on lend-lease shipments:

"Nearly all of the lend-lease food was divided between two of our allies. About three-quarters of it went to Britain or other parts of the Empire, and about a fifth of it went to Russia. By the end of the year, however, the trend of shipments to Russia took a sharp turn upward. In December, for the first time, the shipments to Russia were larger than the combined shipments to the United Kingdom and other British destinations.

"Practically all of the food we sent to Russia went directly to the Red Army. Wherever it went along the long eastern front it helped deal the heaviest blows that have yet staggered Hitler's Army. I am proud to think that American food helped break the siege of Leningrad, helped hold Stalingrad, and helped crack the Nazi lines in the Caucasus.



"The principal products we sent to the British last year were cheese, dry and evaporated milk, dried eggs, canned meats, cured and frozen pork, and lard.

"The Russians last year took sizable amounts of dried eggs, canned meats, pork, dried beans, and wheat and flour. But their crying need was--and is--for edible fats and oils. They asked for tallow, lard, linseed oil, fatback and butter.

"Incidentally, the 1942 butter shipments to Russia came to 17 million pounds which is about one tenth as much as our Army required, and less than one percent of our total supply. There has been criticism of our sending even that much. I don't believe we should begrudge a small shipment of butter to an ally who is fighting so bravely and is doing so much to bring the final downfall of Hitler's power. In fact, the butter shipments that bother some people were a small fraction of the fats and oils we sent to Russia. The Russian soldiers are spreading lard on their black bread. They are eating the tallow and the linseed oil. The Russians especially want some of their fats to be in the form of butter for their soldiers--the soldiers who are rolling back the Germans in subzero fighting. I am glad we could send it to them, and I am sure you are, too."

In commenting on particular foods, Secretary Wickard said, "About one fifth of our pork went to war--a little less than half of that amount was used by our armed forces and the rest by our allies. Even so civilian supplies of pork last year were almost as large as in 1941, and a good deal larger than in the last half of the 1930's.

"Now, let's look at beef. I believe there have been more complaints about shortages of beef than of any other one item. It may surprise you to know that only a fraction of one percent of our last year's beef production went to lend-lease in 1942. About one-eighth of our record production went to our own armed forces. If our total civilian consumption of beef had been larger the extra amount would have come out of the supply for our boys in uniform.

"It's the same story for processed vegetables. Nearly a quarter of our record-breaking pack went to our armed forces and only a small fraction of that amount to our allies. The need of our own fighting men was the reason why our civilian supply of processed vegetables was about a third under that of the year before.

"Grouping all dairy production together, less than 5 percent of the total was used by our armed services, and about 4 percent by our allies. Our civilian supplies were somewhat larger than in the past.

"The Army and Navy used about 4 percent of the year's egg production, and about 10 percent went to our allies. Still civilians ate a slightly larger quantity of eggs than in 1941."

I think you will agree that our food shipments under lend-lease have been a wise investment--and that Secretary Wickard's figures show the shipments have not been large enough to cause serious depletion of our stocks for civilians. In this connection, I think that every citizen should know that there is a division in the Food Distribution Administration which is responsible for carefully weighing all food requirements--civilian, lend-lease, and military--in order to assure the best use of our food supplies. Let me assure you that civilian requirements are not an afterthought. Full consideration to civilian needs is given at every stage of our operations.

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Statement number 2 on my list of "misinformation" is heard less frequently but it indicates no less confusion. It runs something like this: "The Government says food is going to our army - but that couldn't make any difference. Those boys were civilians before they were soldiers-and they ate then, too. There ought to be just as much food left now--our population is just the same."

I am sure that a group like this is familiar enough with the Army diet to know the answer to this one. Many of you have doubtless fed soldiers and sailors in your homes. I hardly need tell you that the American soldier eats more than he ate as a civilian. Here are a couple of comparisons you might like to remember: A civilian normally eats about 16 pounds of butter per year. A man in the armed forces eats about 40 pounds. A civilian during 1935-39 ate about 130 pounds of meat each year. The Army figures about 300 pounds of meat per soldier per year.

We also have to remember that the requirements for our armed forces are for certain types of foods--Federally inspected meat, for example. It is impossible to ship certain foods for our boys overseas, so we have to ship more of other foods. Large quantities of canned fruits and vegetables must be made available to our armed forces overseas, because they are to a large extent dependent upon canned foods.

We civilians should certainly be willing to eat fresh fruits and vegetables whenever they are available. We know that our soldiers need butter and cheese--and these are foods which can be shipped abroad. Certainly we should be willing to eat less ice cream in order to release more milk for the manufacture of butter and cheese.

You will notice that I have refrained from using the word "sacrifice" in connection with these changes in our daily lives. We may regard them as minor inconveniences, sometimes as petty annoyances, but I am sure no man in this room would argue that they are "sacrifices." Let's reserve that word for the contributions of our heroic fighting men who are giving "that last full measure of devotion" upon battlefields all over the world.

A third statement which you have probably heard a number of times is this: "The small grocer just can't operate under all the Government regulations and red tape. The mortality in the grocery business last year was terrific." Now this observation has been made to me so many times that I have almost a memorized answer: The net decline in the number of food stores during the past year was slightly over 5 percent which is actually below normal. The majority of independent grocery stores that closed were small stores with sales under \$10,000 annually. The mortality among such stores is always high--even in normal times. The only thing really significant about the situation is that many of the stores which failed will not be replaced by others--which in turn would be likely to fail. They will not be replaced because the potential merchants can secure more lucrative pay in defense plants, and without the investment of capital. You are entirely aware, I know, that many of the failures each year are caused by insufficient capital and lack of experience. Maybe it is more desirable that some of these merchants secure a good living in industry than a hand-to-mouth existence as grocers.

You may feel that I have given too much time to these statements. You may say, "Everybody knows we will have enough food for our needs--those rumors and exaggerations you spoke of aren't important." I wish I could feel that everybody does know the real facts about our food situation, but unfortunately there are many who do not yet know.

One reason I have emphasized a few of the real facts today is that you can help to pass this information along. You can assume responsibility for informing yourself and your friends, your family, your neighbors, and your customers of the Government's efforts to utilize fully all our food resources in winning this war.

If I have seemed to imply thus far that there are no shortages of food anywhere in the United States, let me correct that impression. We realize that in some areas there have been acute shortages of meat, butter, and eggs--to name three important foods. We realize that further rationing may be necessary to correct the most serious shortages. We realize that population increases in particular sections of the country have affected local supplies very seriously. We know, too, that tremendous increases in consumer purchasing power have made normal supplies appear to be highly inadequate.

We shall continue to work as rapidly as possible to correct the maldistribution of foods. In this connection, I should like to point out that the Food Distribution Administration does not believe that action in Washington is the only solution to many of these problems. We have already established State and local food industry committees to deal with local shortages. These committees have the responsibility for investigating local shortages and devising remedies wherever possible. When the cause of these shortages cannot be dealt with at the State or local level, we in Washington stand ready to take the ball and finish the play. But we certainly don't want to step in until local food industry men have had the opportunity to put their experience and ability to work. We are committed to the belief that American ingenuity and determination can be just as effective on the home front as on the fighting front.

I cannot close without calling your attention to the part which every citizen plays in bringing Victory to the United Nations. Each of us has an individual responsibility which cannot be assumed by anyone else. One of the war correspondents returned from Russia with this story: He visited a military hospital and was told by one of the nurses that a certain patient was so seriously injured that he could never return to the front. In talking with him, the correspondent discovered that the patient's sole desire was to return to active fighting. Knowing that the wounded soldier was doomed to disappointment, and trying to soften the inevitable blow, the correspondent said, "You have done a great deal for your country--perhaps you should rest awhile and let someone else take your place at the front." The soldier's eyes flashed and he replied. "In this war, no man can take another man's place."

Last week you heard the peace terms: "Unconditional surrender of the Axis powers." Let us face the realities necessary to achieve this goal: Unconditional devotion of all our energies to winning the war, unconditional cooperation between Government and business, unconditional assumption by all citizens of the burden and sacrifices which total war imposes, unconditional surrender of selfish interest which conflicts with the public good.



